

TRAVEL

We continue our search for the perfect weekend or midweek break with a visit to The Pheasant Hotel in Harome, North Yorkshire. ROY WOODCOCK reports . . .



ABOVE: One of the beautifully-appointed bedrooms and, right, looking back to the hotel from the village pond



Very Pheasant

Harome, just a couple of miles from Helmsley in North Yorkshire, has got to be my idea of foodie heaven. There's the place that really put the village on the map, the renowned Star Inn, and now, just up the road, the equally fine Pheasant Hotel.

In between there's the village shop to end all village shops. . . . I mean, where else can you buy foie gras and Champagne alongside fabulous local produce?

The common denominator in all this is celebrity chef Andrew Pern who, despite inexplicably losing his Michelin Star this

year, continues to make the Star Inn a must-visit destination for some of the best food in Yorkshire.

Andrew and Jackie Pern also own the shop and have a part interest in the Pheasant with their former head chef Peter Neville. And it was the Pheasant which was our reason for visiting the village on this occasion as part of our ongoing search for the perfect luxury break.

The Pheasant has arguably one of the most beautiful country house settings in the country. This is a village where thatch has never gone out of fashion and in true picture-postcard fashion the hotel overlooks the village pond. Sit on the terrace sipping a G&T and you're more likely than not to see

a parade of ducks heading for home waters.

Originally converted from what had been the blacksmith's shop, village shop and barns, The Pheasant is small – 11 double rooms, two family rooms and a single room – but perfectly formed.

All the rooms are set around a courtyard of fruit trees and all are beautifully furnished and well equipped – ours had Shaker-style furniture, a two-seater sofa and a modern four-poster without drapes, plus the latest in flatscreen TVs.

Across the way, in a separate barn conversion is a heated swimming pool and, alongside that, a beauty treatment room.

Harome is, of course, a great base for

exploring the surrounding North York Moors, Helmsley being a great place to start with its mix of individual shops and tourist attractions like the restored Walled Garden and the ruins of nearby Rievaulx Abbey. But on a short stay that is missing the point – apart from a walk around the village we never left the hotel, so relaxing was it.

An air of tranquility descends upon you the minute you walk through the door and staff are so friendly that nothing seems like too much trouble. Public rooms cry out for you to flop down and relax, whether that's the rustic, stone-floored bar with an impressive open fireplace, the sitting room with an impressive choice of comfy sofas and chairs, or, best of all when the sun's shining, the outdoor terrace.

Everywhere there are books and newspapers to read, including copies of Andrew Pern's two coffee table cookbooks, "Black Pudding And Foie Gras" and "Loose Birds and Game". The sitting room, in fact, almost doubles as a cookery book library.

Once settled in we decamped to the terrace



LEFT: The stone-flagged bar

RIGHT: The conservatory



ABOVE, left: The restaurant. Right: The heated swimming pool



for a cream tea and a G&T. Then it was off to the pool – we had the run of it to ourselves – for a leisurely swim.

The evening was already planned out; an indulgent seven courses that make up the Pheasant's tasting menu in the main restaurant – £65 per person plus £40 if taken with suggested wines.

Chef Peter Neville has, I suggest, a great future – his food was sublime with a wonderful lightness of touch, fantastic taste and colour combinations on the plate, making use of wild herbs and flowers from the adjoining kitchen gardens and exceptional local produce.

Menus have evolved over time to reflect Peter's interests in foraged wild foods and dishes with fresh, clean, deceptively simple flavours and presentation. This ethos is encapsulated in this tasting menu, where the dishes are not simply pared-down versions of larger dishes, but specifically developed for taster-sized portions balancing delicate and more intense flavours. I also loved his passion and enthusiasm; the almost



Beautiful food, beautifully presented



obligatory walk around tables at the end of service being much more than just a quick hello but an insight into the ethos and philosophy of the place.

Not including the amuse bouche and other complimentary morsels served between some of the courses, we experienced a real gourmet cavalcade:

To start, lobster poached in rapeseed oil with courgette fritters, confit tomatoes and coriander; this followed by a salad of globe artichoke and beetroot, dill mayonnaise, roast hazelnuts, garden lettuce and flowers.

The fish course was a real triumph – place cooked in a butter and hazelnut sauce with clams and wild samphire, garlic and lime. Next, a roast sirloin of beef with chopped button mushrooms, layered potatoes cooked in butter and a spinach puree.

Before we went out on a high of the cheese trolley – it literally groans under the weight of the cheeses on offer – there were two sweet offerings: First, nectarine poached with lavender and a nectarine mousse, brioche croutons and a yoghurt sorbet and

then a summer berry gratin.

Every course was served with a flourish by the knowledgeable waiting staff, who took time out to explain in detail what was on the plate, which made the evening a real delight. It moved at a relaxed pace and in many senses you didn't want it to come to the end. Next door to the formal dining room is a light and airy conservatory; it was here we enjoyed a hearty breakfast the next morning. With so much good food on offer it was no wonder we really didn't want to move.

■ The Pheasant is at Harome, near Helmsley. Call 01439 771241 or visit www.thepheasanthotel.com

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■ Dinner, bed and breakfast for two people in a twin or double room starts from £210 per night. A number of special breaks or offers are available including, currently, a late summer or autumn break for £325 per couple per night. It includes a bottle of Champagne and hand-made chocolates in your room on arrival; a hand-tied bunch of fresh flowers to complement your room; and dinner from the tasting menu.

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